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“As our ancestors once lived”: Representation, Performance, and Constructing a National Culture amongst the Nagas of India

Arkotong Longkumer

This paper focuses on how a national culture emerges by examining the Nagas of India. To appreciate this process, the confluence of British colonialism, the postcolonial situation, and contemporary performance of Naga identity (visible in the Hornbill Festival) must be analyzed. I will argue that the colonial era representation of ‘primitivism’ of the Nagas continues into postcolonial narratives of ‘imperialist nostalgia’ disseminated primarily through travel, popular media and museum exhibitions.

I will argue that the Nagas are not simply passive onlookers, but active participants in this enterprise through the strategic articulation of a distinct Naga national image. I will demonstrate that the Nagas are using these colonial era images of ‘primitivism’ for certain purposes, while also promoting a revitalization of traditional culture. First, this process mimics the cumulative notions of primitivism

through a reverse gaze. Second, revitalization acts as a vital force in claiming historical agency predicated on the ‘performance of identity’ and cultural hybridity. Finally, both of these processes help illuminate how the Nagas position themselves within the larger international discourse of indigeneity whereby images, once represented as primitive, now legitimize a distinct national culture.

Keywords: representation, performance, national identity, Nagas, Hornbill Festival.

Introduction

Much of the historical and contemporary literature on the Nagas examines the effects of westernization through colonialism as a dominant drift, a one-way process from colonizers to passive colonials that elides the strategic interplay and complexity of different forces.¹ Some argue that such a drift contributes to the demise of traditional Naga culture to such an extent that only remote areas offer any authenticity (Stirn & van Ham 2000, 2003). Even when the Nagas attempt to revitalize their traditional culture through avenues such as the annual cultural Hornbill Festival, it ends up being superficial and invented, completely discontinuous from earlier times (von Stockhausen 2008). Some recent studies (Oppitz et al. 2008, Kunz & Joshi 2008), on the other hand, have contributed to the evolving aspects of modern Naga identities, highlighting the complex interaction of global and local forces. However, there are no extant studies that investigate the residual effects of colonialism and representation of the Nagas and the subsequent emergence of a distinct Naga national culture. This paper is an attempt to fill this lacuna.

Despite the adverse effects of colonialism in many parts of world, I suggest that we must consider seriously colonialism's role in the proliferation of visual representation of indigenous peoples. Without simply dismissing such visual regimes, I want to argue that they continue to function strategically in the postcolonial situation, particularly when such 'exotic' media enable an articulation of a national identity in a global world. Furthermore, viewing the Nagas as passive onlookers to this continuing interplay of forces contributes to this very lack of critical scholarship; our attention must focus on how they articulate their own history.

This paper will address issues of representation and performance in three interrelated ways. By performance I mean that it is 'performed' for audiences (Ebron 2002: 1), and that it resonates with the active construction of social life (Askew 2002: 23). First, the image of the Nagas generally leans towards 'exoticism.' This is a process that started in the early nineteenth century representations of the Nagas through British colonial contact, who used descriptive and visual media to depict them (savages, head-hunters, warriors) that have had a lasting impact on the perception of the Nagas. Second, these colonial-era representations of 'primitivism' have retained a certain image of the Nagas in the Western mind, reinforced in more recent times through cultural reproductions of the Nagas in museums, tourist brochures, and 'ethnic' clothes and jewelry as a form of 'imperialist nostalgia.' These representations of the Nagas are perpetuated through photographic compi-

lations in books, mostly in the West, due to the financial viability of publishers and wide circulation (Jacobs et al. 1998; Stirn & van Ham 2000, 2003; Saul 2005; Kunz & Joshi 2008; Oppitz et al. 2008; van Ham & Saul 2008).

What are the implications of these representations? Do they act as mirrors for contemporary Naga society? To address these questions, the final aim of this paper is to investigate the relationship between the 'observer' and the 'observed' as a two-way process in which both actors are involved. This reverse gaze is positioned in the larger framework of what I will call the 'performance of identity.' I will argue that in recent times the Nagas are also strategically using and mimicking these 'exotic' images to project and represent a distinct national identity through a revitalization of traditional culture. It permits the Nagas to articulate their histories, produce a certain image for external consumption, and participate in the production of their own image.

I will highlight two interrelated events that resonate with the construction of national imaginaries as an evolving process of negotiation: the annual Hornbill Festival—a cultural performance that attempts to distill the 'essence' of Naga traditions—and the 'national branding,' which brings aesthetics into the context of national identity.²

To understand the interaction between colonial and post-colonial representation and performance of Naga identity, it is important to appreciate the historical context in which the Nagas were present in the British imagination due to the substantial amount of material culture in British museums (it is estimated that there are approximately 12,000 Naga objects in British museums—disproportionately large compared to other 'tribes' of Northeast India and West Burma [West 2011: 201; Macfarlane & Turin 2008]), and their particular obsession with the warrior and headhunting image of the Nagas, a point I return to below. Therefore, it is important to consider the British perception of the Nagas through their early contact in the nineteenth century.

Time Warp of Colonialism: Perception of the Nagas

The earliest Europeans to encounter the Nagas in Assam (India) from around 1822 classified them into two groups: "The *pakka* or genuine Nagas in the north went naked, whereas the Kachcha tribes wearing a sort of short black 'hobble' kilt were regarded on that account as 'half baked' hence *kachcha* or 'raw,' though their affinity to the Nagas bordering on the Assam Valley in the north were clearly recognized" (Hutton 1965: 16). Hutton in fact, while stressing the different village units of organization and languages, suggests a distinct group of people under the umbrella

'Nagas' that make up the various people from the Assam Valley in India to the Hukong Valley in Burma.

An article written in 1865 in the *Pioneer* says, "the only idea which most men had, with reference to the hills and forests [of Assam], was that they were the habitat of savage tribes, whose bloody raids and thieving forays threatened serious danger to the cause of tea" (Elwin 1959b: xvi). These early descriptions of the Nagas were represented in contradistinction to that of the paternalistic West, which was seen as humane, orderly and enlightened. A classic mid-nineteenth century picture of this image by Col. R.G. Woodthorpe is of a gathering of British officers, Indian soldiers, and diverse Naga tribesmen in various ceremonial dresses, armed with traditional spears while oddly looking quite tamed. In a way, the image "combines the realism of the figures with a representation of a desired set of relations in the colonial system: exoticism tempered by the order and harmony of the Raj" (Jacobs et al. 1998: 17). To use Susan Sontag's analogy of the photograph as a pervasive medium of preservation, the Nagas (and the colonial Raj) "testify to time's relentless melt" (1978: 15).

The project of representation deeply impacted on the Imperial notion of power relations. Inherent in these representations is the treatment of the Nagas as the 'other' through which European culture was able to regulate, produce, and consume knowledge of them for the colonial and orientalist imagination (see Said 1978). The notion that the Nagas present fascinating museum specimens was adduced by Henry Balfour, one of the chief architects of the Pitt Rivers Museum's (in Oxford, England) collection. He urged colonial administrators to collect as much material culture as possible or, as he put it, "If we aim at equitable administration of subject races, the chief essential is close investigation of their indigenous culture" (Balfour 1923: 27). They highlight the need to display 'the other' as exotic, making it the object of scrutiny. Tony Bennett (1995) terms this the 'exhibitionary complex.'

Drawing on the works of Michel Foucault on power and knowledge, Bennett urges us to look at the ways in which public museums are not simply instruments for instruction, but how they shape the body politic in relation to social routines and performances through exhibitions. Focusing primarily on nineteenth century discourses, one strategy of the 'exhibitionary complex' was that it emphasized the distinction between the subjects and objects of power, not so much within the national body itself, but organized by the 'many rhetorics of imperialism.' In other words, through the 'exhibitionary complex' and the representation of otherness, museum displays illuminated the rhetorical effects of power (Bennett 1995: 67).

The importance of Bennett's discussion on the ideological motives of the nexus between rhetoric, theater, and power in museums highlights issues surrounding representation that are visible in public displays of the Nagas (see also Kikon 2009). The reason for the public profile, argues Andy West, is due to the popularity of the Nagas in the British public mind. Reams of pages were devoted to the topic on the Nagas from around 1822-1920; J.H. Hutton, a seasoned administrator working in the then Naga Hills, lists over 400 publications. These publications only increased the profile of the Nagas in Britain through images of them in full ceremonial dress in which they would "appear dramatic and exotic, with feather headdresses...cloth and shell loin cloths and aprons" (West 2011: 93). Alongside the burgeoning readership amongst different classes, the presence of material culture of the Nagas such as spears, *dao* (hacking knives), various ceremonial dresses and accoutrements, and technological tools in British museums only reinforced their perception of the Nagas as warriors and headhunters tempered with exoticism. For example, *The Golden Budget for Boys*, published around 1930, had an illustration of a Sema Naga warrior, even though the image had no direct relevance to the content of the book. Its presence was to elicit a connection between empire, masculinity, and the relationship between indigenous peoples and the paternalistic "role of the white man," while evoking a sense of adventure into unknown territories (West 2011: 93). While we can perhaps understand such views within the context of empire and colonialism, it is baffling as to why such nineteenth century views persist. Surveying the general tourist brochures and coffee-table books on the Nagas, the residual effects of this 'exhibitionary complex' continue to plague the public imagination.

Imperialist Nostalgia: Preservation of Culture

The most telling example of this is the work done by Peter van Ham and Jamie Saul (2008) and Peter van Ham and Agjala Stirn (2000, 2003). In their works, they present an image of the Nagas that depicts the notion of the 'noble savage' in traditional regalia, with minimal 'modern influences,' without the interference of the outsider's photographic gaze. This portrayal is reiterated on van Ham's website³ as well as in radio programs⁴ and newspaper articles that generate, what Renato Rosaldo calls, 'Imperialist Nostalgia,' which:

...occurs alongside a peculiar sense of mission, 'the white man's burden,' where civilized nations stand duty-bound to uplift so-called savage ones. In this ideologically constructed world of ongoing progressive change, putatively static savage societies become a stable reference point for defining...civilized

identity. 'We' (who believe in progress) valorize innovation, and then yearn for more stable worlds, whether these reside in our own past, in other cultures, or in the conflation of the two...When the so-called civilizing process destabilizes forms of life, the agents of change experience transformations of other cultures as if they were personal losses. (1989: 70)

This nostalgia is expressed in van Ham and Stirn's work (and work of this kind in general), which invokes a sense that the Nagas represent idyllic conditions where 'proper' human values and morals thrive, in sharp contrast to the hedonism and decline of the West. These nostalgic projects are situated within the global economy of cultural production that enables them to function under huge financial support from different organizations with similar agendas. Furthermore, these projects are targeted towards a particular audience that has the economic means to purchase expensive color illustrations. In a way, Rosaldo's warning of this sort of nostalgia delineates the power relations between those who have the means to control production and those whose images are portrayed only on the pages of books. In an article written about his and Jamie Saul's recent 'Expedition Diaries' (published in 2008 as *Expedition Naga*), van Ham reflects on his first journey to work on the Nagas:

The authorities in northeast India asked me to write a book on the Naga because they were pleased with a book I wrote on the tribes between Tibet and Burma. I didn't think there was any tradition left to document in Nagaland, but they assured me that there was and I should come and see it for myself. That was in 1996.⁵

Even when he goes to see for himself, he is primarily interested in representations of traditions, and in his descriptions of village life he draws an unequivocal line between pre-Christian (traditional) and Christian (modern), as if the two are neatly separated. But, equally, 'state officials' from Nagaland are also complicit in this representation, as only under their patronage could such an undertaking be possible. For instance, official state publications of brochures and books also reinforce these 'exotic' images—the recent Nagaland Government, Department of Art and Culture, publications *Where Warriors Waltz: Festivals of Nagaland* (2008) and *Souvenir: State Road Show cum Tsokum Festival* (2010) illustrate a recreated untainted and pristine habitat without much 'modern' intervention. The state's motivation for such representations is partly economic (through tourism) but also providing a stage where traditional performances can help preserve Naga culture, a point I return to below.

In van Ham's works, it appears as if the ills of the modern world are all too much for the Nagas, and their only solution is to revive past traditions, to root themselves amidst all the dislocation. Van Ham goes on to explain:

I and my co-author, Jamie Saul, went to the most isolated parts of Nagaland, which are the most traditional. The people there have gone back to the old ways because they feel alien to modern mainland India.⁶

This critique of the works by van Ham and the activities of the Government of Nagaland allow me to delve into issues of 'tradition' and the 'modern.' In Zeme Naga villages in North Cachar Hills (Assam, India) these distinctions are far from clear. Villagers mull over making bamboo baskets against the ease of procuring plastic bags; gas cookers signify prestige and comfort over the tedium of cooking at the fire place; traditional clothes are abandoned for lighter, easy cotton shirts, blouses, and trousers; and securing Government jobs is far better than working in the fields. These choices are very much made in the 'ethnographic present,' and when people are left to choose between 'survival' and 'preserving culture,' it is often the former that takes precedence. I suggest that this top-down sort of 'imperialist nostalgia' fails to highlight the complex realities 'on the ground' because the selling point of these 'exotic places' as getaways from modern life will be undermined if in reality these villages sometimes prize the 'modern' over the 'traditional.'

At the beginning of the paper, I made the point that the image of Nagas in contemporary times is very much tied in with the twin forces of historical agency and dependent capitalism through which new dimensions of authenticity are produced. In other words, the Nagas are realizing the strategic importance of these nostalgic images, in terms of their attractiveness in a global culture, where difference and authenticity are all important as marketing tools that must be used for one's advantage. In the second part of the paper, I will interrogate this point through the larger discourse of the performance of identity and the attempt by the Nagas to generate a national culture. To begin untangling some of these knots, let us start by analyzing the annual Hornbill Festival.

The Hornbill Festival⁷

The Hornbill Festival, with much fanfare, states that Nagaland is the 'land of festivals' with numerous colorful events held throughout the year, celebrated by its many 'tribes.'⁸ In order to facilitate and represent such diversity, the Government of Nagaland came up with the idea that a single festival would be organized annually which would



Figure 1. Advertisement of the Hornbill Festival in Kohima 2011.

(Arkotong Longkumer, 2011)

showcase the *mélange* of ‘Naga’ culture. This is to educate the local Nagas as well as to enable tourists to catch a glimpse of Naga culture within this brief period of seven days held from the first of December.

This date is significant for two reasons. First, the Festival is to celebrate Indian statehood. Nagaland was formed when the moderate elites of the Naga nationalist movement, the Nagaland People’s Convention (NPC), arrived at a compromise with the Government of India (GOI) in 1963 regarding a ‘state’ for the Nagas. Thus, Nagaland was inaugurated as the sixteenth state of the Indian Union on 1 December 1963.⁹ The second factor that made the Festival possible was the ceasefire signed between the Government of India and one of the main nationalist group, Naga Socialist Council of Nagalim (headed by Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) in 1997, which carved a politically neutral space where peace and reconciliation between the various actors—such as student/civil/church/government/nationalist factions—could ensue (Kikon 2005). For the Naga public, the Festival can be viewed as a popular cultural space, a reprieve from the long drawn out armed insurgency and militarization in the region. In fact, many families told me that the Festival provides a healthy civic space for a ‘family excursion’ as there is something for everybody—from cultural performances and children’s activities to food and shopping. In a way, these involvements by local communities create a culture of curiosity and entanglement with one’s own past

that raises significant questions as to what the Festival represents for the Naga public and tourist, a point I return to below.

The Hornbill Festival represents primarily the 16 official tribes of Nagaland and not the other ‘Naga’ communities from the Naga inhabited areas, which has caused some controversy.¹⁰ A senior journalist from Nagaland told me, “I think it is a matter of protocol as well as political sense that one does not try to be too ‘nationalist’ with regard to the Festival and appreciate it as a ‘state’ Festival.” As a point of departure, I agree that this is a ‘state’ Festival, though fixing the Nagas solely to the geo-political boundaries of Nagaland without acknowledging the Nagas out-with can potentially side-line the recent demands for all Naga-inhabited areas to form a distinct sovereign unit.¹¹

Kisama: Naga Heritage Village

The Festival is held at Kisama, in Kohima district of Nagaland, which is also recognized as a ‘Naga Heritage Village.’ The site itself is designed as a mini-village with its substantial looming wooden ceremonial gates, amphitheatres, large indoor shopping areas, and dormitories (or *morungs*), resplendent with Naga symbols such as wooden figurines of human and animal characters, spears, and *dao*. Each tribe of Nagaland is assigned a *morung*, placed strategically according to their geographic location within the map of Nagaland.

The Festival over the years has become a mega-state event that includes stalls selling food, clothes and artifacts, encouraging local, regional and national entrepreneurs to participate; it also hosts a number of indigenous games like Naga acrobatics, pig-chasing, and Naga chili (the hottest in the world!) eating competitions. Alongside the staging of indigenous invocation and songs, Christian hymns and operatic music, it has also introduced rock, fashion and art shows and a bizarre World War II themed car rally that is an attempt to cater to a variety of audiences both within and outside Nagaland. What is central though is the performance of tradition, particularly the different Naga dances that usually draw a mixed crowd of locals, performers, tourists, and professional media personnel.

The Hornbill Festival for Internal Consumption

The importance of the 'performance of tradition' within the Hornbill Festival means that the role of Christianity must be explored. Christianity in Nagaland is significant to Naga identity to the extent that almost 95 percent profess to be Christians.

Although Christian conversion was nothing spectacular in the first 50 years or so, when the American Baptist Missionaries came to the Naga Hills (now Nagaland) in 1872, Christianity slowly made inroads and gradually gained momentum after Indian independence in 1947. This is related to the burgeoning national movement for Naga independence and the retaliatory force of the Indian state through its security forces. While it is true that Christianity provides the Nagas with a political identity, it is also the case that Christianity represents a strong culture of belief. It is the latter process that has often proved difficult when negotiating with pre-Christian traditional culture, which has some resonance with the Hornbill Festival.

During the early years of American Baptist activity in the Naga Hills, missionaries often drew a clear distinction for converts between Christian and pre-Christian culture. For instance, dances, songs, and festivals that contradicted Christian teachings were discouraged and were often abandoned due to their supposedly 'demonic' association with custom and tradition. This evangelical, monotheistic zeal meant that only Jehovah was to be worshipped. Of course, dances and festivals were not abandoned wholesale, but now they were strictly policed and purified of their 'demonic' (phrases that extolled sexual licentiousness, rice-beer, ancestral and nature spirits) references. Lamenting the loss of traditional culture in this process, a well-known Naga scholar notes: "A new life-style...[included] the rejection of the traditional festivals, songs, dances, sacrifices, observances of *genna* [prohibitions], slavery and

headhunting. All practices which did not conform to the Christian faith, that is, the western norm of Christianity, were condemned as evil and thus abandoned" (Longchar 2000: 148). While the Hornbill Festival has raised a few eyebrows amongst the churches, the views I gathered from various people suggest that like any new idea, it takes time for people to adjust.

Speaking at length with an Ao pastor, Moa, in Kohima, he noted that many of the churches and pastors are ignorant of the Hornbill Festival. In 2011, approximately 30 Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) members gathered at Kisama before the Festival and had a "prayer walk." Including him, five pastors were asked to pray. Four of them were very negative about the Festival; they claimed that it encouraged "bad behavior - liquor, drugs, partying and so on" to the point that they asked "God to come down and intervene and do something." When Moa prayed, he focused on the positive aspects of the Festival: first, that it represents a national culture where all Nagas can come together and that we should "thank God for giving wisdom to the leaders to have a state festival"; second, that it provides an opportunity for tourism; third, that it gives a platform to the young and talented Naga youth through art and music competition, opportunities to artisans and entrepreneurs to sell their products; and finally, that this is the only recreational space in Kohima where one can bring families to enjoy food, dancing, entertainment, and play in the children's park. When he finished praying with these points, he noted how most of those gathered were "converted." He realized they had not thought of the positive aspects of the Hornbill Festival, and that their judgment was clouded by the Festival's negative features.

When asked if the Hornbill is a return to the pre-Christian traditional culture, he agreed that to some extent the event encourages a revitalization of culture, but cautioned against introducing elements that are 'demonic.' He said that the introduction of rice beer would be completely objectionable because it is associated with shamanistic rituals and it contradicted the Christian faith. (I note that large amounts of rice beer are sold and consumed on-site, a situation about which the church is critical). Aside from these elements, preserving Naga traditional culture is permissible, because, as he commented, the performers are also Christian. "After the Festival they will all go back to their normal lives which includes going to church, so there isn't any clash between the festival and one's Christian identity."

Christians performing in the Festival are merely acting; no one would go back and revert to their pre-Christian beliefs. These are the sentiments often heard amongst many Nagas

and that the Festival's celebration of tradition is not a conscious form of resurrecting all aspects of pre-Christian Naga culture but in an important sense Naga identity, like any form of change, must cohabit multiple identities, and here the Festival does not necessarily clash with Christianity. In fact, in 2012 a cross was erected by one of the organizers on a hill to symbolize Kisama Naga Heritage village as a Christian site. He told me that, like most Naga Christian villages, Kisama "symbolizes Christ's influence, a bit like Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro." Indeed, in many ways Christianity provides an aspiration to national belonging, which is differently emphasized from those that are present in the Festival.¹² Therefore, I am not suggesting that the Festival is *the* representative of Naga national culture as other processes could equally amplify it.

Based on a collation of different views of the Festival, there are layers of meaning for the Nagas and what it represents:

One view is that the Festival educates the younger Nagas to appreciate their traditions and customs such as dance, clothes, ornaments, food, stories, or as one participant put it, "how our ancestors once lived." In 2007 Khekiye Sema, the Commissioner for Tourism, Art, and Culture, said that the Festival is primarily for the younger generation because they are losing out, as Naga culture is going through a sort of 'amnesia.' This is where the Festival provides a forum: Naga culture becomes an educational tool. Villagers often remarked that participating in the Festival itself meant rehearsing with elders the specific dance steps and songs that they were unaware of and made them more familiar with tradition. Indeed, Sema strongly denied that through this Festival Nagas are simply selling their 'nakedness.' He said, "we are preserving continuity with tradition and must appreciate that with the changes in the world, we must also preserve our distinctiveness."

The second view is that the Festival reinforces a 'Naga community.' Some participants from Chang, Phom, Pochury, Khamniungan, and Konyak areas of Nagaland, for example, said that aside from their immediate vicinity they had little knowledge of far-flung Naga communities. The Festival, in a way, reinforces Benedict Anderson's idea of the "imagined political community"—that the power of nationalism goes beyond the dialectical relation of culture to the political economy, but focuses on how people 'imagine' their relations to those with whom they have no direct and daily interaction (Pandya 2009: 2-3).

The third view is that the Festival is Nagaland-state-managed and delegates from each 'tribal' region are required to represent their 'culture.' Cultural troupes of performers are in fact invited by the Nagaland Government, which funds their travel, food, and accommodation. Many said

that otherwise it would be impossible to attend the Festival. What is significant in this discussion is the attempt to construct a national Naga culture that is conjunctural: between diverse local expressions and the manner in which the state is attempting to consolidate and fix the image of the social life of the Nagas as national essence. What the state is attempting to do through the Festival is to provide, for both the performer and the audience, a chance to view and experience a mini-cultural universe (the 'Naga Heritage Village,' the site for the Festival), emblazoned through the depiction of selective practices that attempt to market a heritage. Therefore, a 'Naga culture' is depicted, superseding local variants, which is a product of the entanglement between the local, national, and the global mediated through the Nagaland state. This is something that goes beyond the Festival but also includes national performances (in Indian Republic and Independence Day parades), cultural road shows, and tribal festivals that underpin the *interaction* between performance—mostly traditional Naga dances—capitalism, and social identities. For the Nagaland state, these interactions are advantageous because it allows them to 'manage' a Naga national image through a rereading of history that is restored back into tradition and then generates the idea of 'national patrimony' (García Canclini 1995).

Drawing from his work in Mexico and Latin America, Néstor García Canclini suggests that the staging of patrimony must be dramatized through cultural ritualization that provides political force (1995: 109). This broader theoretical point is useful in the Naga context because the uses of history and tradition are very much about representing Naga identity through the consensus of 'culture' (playing into the headhunter/exotic image), which is then produced into cultural artefacts and transformed into goods to be consumed at museums, curio shops, official calendars, souvenirs, websites, video productions, and books.

The fourth view generally centers on what the Festival represents. Is it an 'authentic' and 'genuine' projection of Naga culture or does it fail in this regard? For some, the Festival is "invented out of thin air;" a "culture show" that is "an empty husk done up in a banal presentation as nothing more than kitsch...that serves a highly commercialized, superficial understanding of culture" (Stockhausen 2008: 71). But who is to interpret 'culture' according to set principles? What are its parameters and boundaries? It appears that there is an expectation for the Nagas to perform 'culture' in a prescribed manner that incorporates certain repertoires of accepted criteria, to avoid being kitsch and superficial. I think such a view itself comes with an ideological position that carries an expectation of something to be 'done properly.' Von Stockhausen continues, "so instead



Figure 2. Hybrid cultures and the reverse gaze: A Khamniungan Naga taking a photograph of a tourist in Hornbill Festival 2012.

(Michael Heneise, 2012)

they concoct a self-image that has virtually no connection with the pre-colonial culture” (2008: 73). But can culture truly be a terrain that is enclosed, and so neat and tidy?¹³ The problem presented here deals with what ‘culture’ entails and how it is deployed in different contexts. Is there a normative, authentic or ‘pure’ form of ‘culture?’ The example of the Nagas would appear to indicate that there are many strands to culture, making it more fragmentary or hybrid than the Nagaland state or authors like van Ham would have us believe.

Representation and External Consumption of Festival and Culture

One of the most crucial and basic questions that the Festival attempts to address is ‘what does it mean to be Naga?’ and how does this relate to the question of identity through modernization and development? We have discussed the nostalgic images of the Nagas and their economic potential in attracting tourists. This, in itself, is a reason to accommodate such images. However, if we are to agree that ‘culture’ is in fact a hybrid then this brings us to examine new dimensions of what it is to be ‘authentic’ and how questions of identity do not rely simply on a salvaged past.

I suspect that the Nagas’ re-conception of authenticity is reflected in the following explanation:

Authenticity is reconceived as hybrid, creative activity in a local present-becoming-future. Non-western cultural and artistic works are impli-

cated by an interconnected world cultural system without necessarily being swamped by it. Local structures produce *histories* rather than simply yielding to *History*. (Clifford 1987: 126)

This means that urbanization and the transaction of capital ‘tradition’—whether through festive or artisanal avenues—does not lie in opposition to the ‘modern.’ What Guss (2001) and García Canclini (1995) argue convincingly is that the process of identity production should be viewed as “part of a continually changing interplay of political, economic, and historical forces” (Guss 2001: 6). To comprehend this phenomenon, García Canclini provides an insightful analysis of the way modernity is the interaction of the “sociocultural hybrids in which the traditional and the modern are mixed” through the on-going transformation of cultural space (1995: 2).

Although focusing on Mexico and Latin America, García Canclini’s analysis is useful because it traces hybridity through cultural issues, particularly the interaction of the different domains of the modern, traditional, cultured, popular, the role of the marketplace, and the fuzzy boundaries that exist between them. Although he is concerned with the organizing principles of these interactions, he also brings to focus its expressive nature through what he calls ‘hybridization’ as a process. While some critics would say that the very fragmentary project of hybridity connotes disruptions, contestations and chaos, I would argue that the fragmentary nature of Naga identity itself implies cultural creativity and in this is an inevitable consequence of change. As Aijaz Ahmad helpfully reminds us, hybridi-

ty's aim is not only to stress difference and contingency, but to articulate a coherent "sense of place, of belonging, of some stable commitment to one's class or gender or nation" (quoted in Werbner & Modood 1997: 21). As I have suggested throughout this paper, the relationship between tradition and modernity underscores the significance of the power of cultural performances to express a national culture that is 'authentic' for the Naga at least. Authenticity then is a form of cultural hybridity of the 'traditional' and the 'modern' that gives rise to the fragmentary nature of Naga identity. Authenticity itself, therefore, cannot be fixed but has different trajectories.

Authenticity of Image vs. Inauthenticity of Practice

The notion of the hybridity of culture does however clash with the 'outside' image of the Nagas. For example, some Western tourists who come to the Festival or to Nagaland want to view some form of 'authentic' Naga in his traditional environment. A tourist from the Netherlands, Johan, said that he came to the Hornbill Festival in 2007 primarily to experience 'real' Naga culture. However, for him the Festival failed in this regard and, he said, remote villages offered more authenticity. When Johan visited Mon district of Nagaland, in Konyak Naga villages, he noticed how women still went about bare-chested, and how traditional thatched huts were the norm. In contrast, in towns like Kohima, Nagas have adopted Western style clothing and modern-style housing, and young people are now carrying MP3 players—for him this is not 'real' Naga culture.

So perhaps Johan was questioning the significance behind abandoning traditional clothes for Western ones: does this signify that one is better than the other in terms of value? Or does this simply signify that traditional clothes cause embarrassment, and the adoption of Western clothes is now to blend in? The tourists are searching for the 'authentic' Naga but are only really interested in what is considered more traditional. But the question is why is this 'tribal' image more authentic than someone who wears western clothes when such clothes are practical and have social status? Nagas in fact do not want to dissuade the tourists of this misconception since it is to their disadvantage, both in terms of trade from tourism, and in terms of representing themselves in a global world where indigeneity has become such an important signifier for identity.

National Branding: Aesthetics and History

In this respect the Hornbill Festival has created a local economy aware of the market potential for Naga artefacts, clothing and handicrafts, while carving a distinct voice for national unity. This trend can be viewed from a perspec-

tive of branding national identity (Aronczyk 2007). One example of this branding was when the state Government of Nagaland, coinciding with Indian Independence Day on 15 August 2005, changed its emblem from the national symbol of India—the Ashoka wheel and Lion Capital of Ashoka—to traditional Naga motifs. This move was initiated by the regional ruling party DAN (Democratic Alliance of Nagaland) headed by the Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio.

The main feature of the new emblem is an indigenous species of bison called *mithun*, symbolizing wealth and status. It is perched on a traditional log drum and surrounded by various Naga symbols such as spears, *dao*, and a shield, which according to the official Nagaland Government description is 'used for defence by Naga warriors that speak the inherent trait of the Nagas to defend and protect their land.' Reports suggest that Neiphiu Rio told the Indian Home Ministry that 'the move was aimed at sending a clear message to the central government about the desire of the Naga people to come together under a single administrative umbrella.'¹⁴ The proposed new symbol depicted Naga culture with the word 'unity' above the state's name. This was interpreted on some fronts as the Nagaland Government supporting the NSCN-IM's move to form a 'Greater Nagaland' or 'Nagalim.'¹⁵

Peter Van Ham remarks that this technique, which promotes national identity through changing the symbol in the Naga case, represents a 'shift in political paradigms, a move from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of images and influence.' For Van Ham 'style' trumps 'substance,' and national loyalty can often be replaced by brand loyalty, as is increasingly the case within Europe (van Ham 2001: 120-121). Although the context is very different, van Ham's comments can be applicable without making such delineations between 'style' and 'substance' in the Naga case. The local production of Naga aesthetic objects, like arts and crafts, brands a particular national identity as an efficient vehicle to carry and mirror local culture. Moreover, since national identity can be closely tied in with the performing arts and aesthetic culture, the Nagas are ever more conscious of incorporating art into the context of nationalism. The Hornbill Festival and the proliferation of artistic activities strongly promote such a position.¹⁶

Although such a proposition can be viewed within a strong capitalistic economy of image 'branding,' at least in the case of the Nagas it is most likely that the image is an attempt to project a distinct Naga identity that is different to the rest of India, while also promoting a sense of ownership, history and political sophistication to the outside world. While the Festival and the branding of the

nation operate within the framework of the larger Indian state, there are apparent contradictions about how this process unravels. For the Indian state, the Nagas represent the diversity of India and these activities open up possibilities for tourism and economic liberalization. For the Nagas, their distinctiveness only makes them peripheral to the Indian state and its policies. These views exhibit the tension between the territorial imprint of the Indian state and the national imaginary of the Nagas. Therefore, not only are the Naga elite and the nationalists able to usurp these activities to promulgate a national culture that creates unique *histories*, but at the same time, the uneven distribution of power and how these representations are being co-opted is giving rise to fissures, and disempowering those from the rural areas who are largely required to produce 'culture' on demand.

In light of this, it is attractive to visualize the Naga nation through its emblematic portrayals of unity and diversity. The Government of Nagaland depicts the Nagas: "[who] by nature, are lovers of fun and frolic and here life is one long festival. The Nagas with their *joie de vivre* [sic] dance and songs are a part and parcel of all their festivities."¹⁷ The new symbol depicted by the word 'unity' itself belies the internal complexities and the political and social realities that embody Nagaland and the Naga people. Occasional inter-factional feuds between the different Naga nationalist groups occur, with each claiming that they are the bearers of the 'true' and 'authentic' nationalist vision. The complex issue of 'Greater Nagalim' is itself a vision not shared unanimously by all Nagas.¹⁸

Clearly there are differences in the internally and externally generated conceptions of nation and national identity. If the intent of the Hornbill Festival, and its image of the Nagas, is to achieve a desired economic end, then its national brand functions successfully for external consumption. Yet, if we want to conceive the nation in its complexities of national formation "as an ethno-historical project, as a palimpsest of discoveries and interpretations of the past, as a site of ongoing contention and struggle, as a receptacle of heritage, or as a multiplicity of identities—all of which make up a nation's distinctive culture—then conceiving nationalism in terms of a brand identity is a lopsided...project" (Aronczyk 2007: 123).

I agree with Aronczyk's remarks that nationalism and "brand identity" represent only a partial project when it comes to the complexities of envisioning national identity. Furthermore, as I have discussed, not all Nagas ascribe to the image of one universal nation that supersedes all other local variants. The conception of a nation however can have differing and uneven ideas – which does not mean

that the nation is any less 'real' I have argued that images can act as a powerful metaphor for representing 'unity' and indeed incorporate the arts as a central motif. While images of the Nagas, through portrayals of 'nakedness,' create nostalgia for tourists, such exotic bodily representation can equally act as a powerful tool of resistance and protest (Kikon 2009: 95). These notions seem to suggest that a distinct Naga national culture is being shaped in and through the Festival, and its national branding projects a global identity of indigeneity which can encompass hybrid authenticity and aid in the desire for self-determination.

Conclusion

In this paper I have demonstrated that the representation and the performance of identity have significant historical and contemporary formations. I have suggested that viable continuities exist between the colonial and postcolonial situation, and one must appreciate the way images, once deployed for colonialism's purpose, continue to shape the current landscape as an attractive medium for tourism and identity in the global arena. This is especially true with the Nagas. Since early colonial contact with the British in 1822, images and material culture of the Nagas were collected for scientific and imperial purposes to understand 'subject races.' Subsequently, these images circulated and produced a caricature of them as 'primitive' or as 'head-hunters.' This would have a lasting impression on how the Nagas are represented. Even today, the feeling of 'imperialist nostalgia' continues to be a link to the paternalistic and colonial representation of the Nagas.

However, though this representation continues the Nagas are also using the 'exotic' image to portray a certain idea of themselves through the performance of identity. On the one hand, representing themselves as 'exotic' attracts tourists, particularly evident in the Hornbill Festival. On the other hand, it allows them to shape a distinct Naga national culture which has larger purchase in this global arena of glorifying indigenous identities. The question then is, what sort of Naga culture is emerging through the interaction of the local and global?

The best way to understand these issues is through the notion of cultural hybridity that melds 'tradition' and the 'modern' not as opposing forces in competition, but as complementary. Hybrid cultures produce new forms of 'authenticity' that do not yield to normative values of what exactly is 'traditional' and 'modern,' instead they appeal to innovative techniques that create new histories and cultures. Theja Meru, a Naga entrepreneur, emphasized these points: "even though Nagaland is small in size and remote, in heart [sic] Naga culture is beautiful. Nagas must survive;

Naga culture shouldn't be parochial but global; but we should be able to find ourselves in this modern world." The argument that this hybrid representation is used strategically by the Nagas resonates with Craig Calhoun's (1997) notion that the idea of a nation increasingly helps communicate a sense of belonging in the world system. However, the problem over what exactly connotes 'authentic culture' is exacerbated by certain representations of the Nagas; the tourist is confounded when they witness a dissonance between what Naga culture should be and what it is 'on the ground.' This is a tension that will continue to prevail as long as these visuals circulate the public space. But this problem is not singular. As I have shown, even the Nagas are constantly negotiating what represents 'authentic' culture. Indeed, remembering their own past is a difficult, if not, complex negotiation, even relying on external agents to revive memories. When the book, *The Nagas* (1998), written by a group of anthropologists in Cambridge, was published much of the material collection (primarily shawls, bracelets and necklaces) provided a pictorial glimpse into the Naga past. After seeing this book, many middle-class Nagas started reusing these designs for clothes and jewelry to wear as 'ethnic clothes' or to present to others as 'authentic' Naga objects. What was once abandoned unleashed the memory of the past. Now these colonial archives are embodied and performed through the curious process of mimesis (see for example Taussig 1993).

However, there is also the caution by Christian churches to be wary of what is resurrected and revived as it could clash with their Christian faith. Such cautionary tales are appended by a strong desire to 'preserve' pre-Christian culture, which, in most cases, is seen as laudatory (for instance aspects of the Hornbill Festival I discussed), though it remains an uneasy process when challenged by traditional elements that contradict Christianity. These negotiations are on going—from early Christian reluctance, to acceptance—and what future cultural change may bring remains to be seen. To reiterate Clifford's point again, local structures produce *histories*, and in the Naga case give rise to a national culture, rather than simply yielding to *History*. The paper has provided some insights into the complexities of how a national culture can emerge while demonstrating that the parameters of Naga culture are constantly evolving to represent the complex global space of cultural connections.

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Endnotes

1. When I use the term 'Naga' I have two aims in mind. More generally I mean the ethnic Nagas of Northeast India (who inhabit the Indian states of Nagaland, Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh) and Western Burma. More specifically I mean the Nagas in the Indian state of Nagaland. I will however differentiate its usage according to context, throughout the article.
2. It is important to make two caveats. First, although I am primarily interested in the 'West' from the Nagas' perspective, I acknowledge that such processes need more reflexive analyses, wherein the 'West' does not simply exist in a single gaze (Adams 1996: 11-12). Second, this paper does not deal with how the Indian state 'represents' the Nagas—as part of the wider (diverse) Indian community or as a recalcitrant 'periphery' unable to appreciate its inclusion within the greater Indian state. For instance, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, was very keen to emphasize the cultural diversity of India (Nehru 1969). Nehruvian policy was to integrate the 'tribal' population of India into the national mainstream ("unity in diversity") (see Elwin 1959a), often visually expressed by Nehru himself through sartorial signifiers imprinted, in this case, on a stamp of him in Naga traditional accouterments as political stratagem, entitled *Nehru and Nagaland* (Tarlo 1996: 125). Therefore, there is

much to be discussed in terms of the legal, administrative and the historical categorical formations of the term 'tribe' within India and the Indian constitution, something which is beyond the scope of this paper.

3. Van Ham and Stirn also run a website called "Society for the Preservation and Promotion of Naga Heritage" (SPNH): <<http://www.spnh.com/Pages/English/SPNH-overview.html>>.

4. Aired on Radio 4, 26 July 2008 under the travel program "Excess Baggage."

5. P. Ham, "Nagaland: India's Lost World," *The Guardian Weekly*, 22 August, 2008.

6. P. Ham, "Nagaland: India's Lost World."

7. Most of the interviews mentioned in the paper were done in 2007 and 2012.

8. <<http://www.hornbillfestival.com/>> (accessed 17 December 2008).

9. The Nagas have been demanding an independent, sovereign country since the formation of the Naga Club in 1929 (then under British administration). Changed later to the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946, it was the main apex Naga body fighting for Naga independence. When India gained independence in 1947, the NNC and the GOI became embroiled in dialogue regarding the future of the Nagas within India. With talks faltering, armed skirmishes between the NNC and the Indian Army began in the early 1950s. Statehood in 1963 did little to appease some Naga nationalists, who condemned it as a 'sell out' of the political will of the Naga people. They formed an alternate movement in 1980, the Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) (Nagaland was later changed to 'Nagalim' to signal the Naga inhabited areas outwith the state of Nagaland in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Burma). NSCN further split into NSCN-IM (Isak-Muivah—the largest and most powerful of the Naga groups) and NSCN-K (Khaplang), which later split into NSCN-Kehoi-Khole. The NNC still remains active though weak; it has also split into various factions such as NNC (Adinno), NNC (Senkha), NNC (Signya), and recently NNC (Khiamniungan). Ceasefire agreements between the GOI and the NSCN (IM/K/Kehoi-Khole) are under way.

10. The 16 official tribes according to the Government of Nagaland are: Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Kachari, Khiamniungan, Kuki, Konyak, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sumi, Sangtam, Yimchungru, and Zeliang.

11. Other Nagas from Burma, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have participated in the Festival. Similarly non-Naga communities from the Northeast of

India also take part, while international participants have been the Television network *Arirang* from South Korea and dance groups from Bhutan.

12. I provide an account of the importance of Christianity to Naga national identity in a forthcoming article entitled 'Moral Geographies: The problem of sovereignty and indigeneity amongst the Nagas'

13. Indeed, the category 'culture' itself has been much debated which demonstrates the fragile and sometimes ambiguous nature of its use; however, this is not the place to rehearse these debates. For a fuller overview of some of the issues see Brightman 1995.

14. This event was also covered by a Pakistan-based newspaper, *Daily Times* and the *Organiser* (a right-wing Hindu newspaper) which wrote a very critical piece labelling the move as 'dangerous:' <www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_10-7-2005_pg7_3> and <www.organiser.org/dynamic/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=94&page=3> (accessed 15 May 2009).

15. The current peace process between the various nationalists groups has been underway since 1997. The largest and most influential of the groups, the NSCN-IM, is demanding a 'supra-state' (Greater Nagaland or Nagalim) that incorporates Naga inhabited areas in the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh into a single contiguous territorial entity. It is still unclear how the talks are proceeding nor is it clear if the Indian Government will grant such a demand, without consulting with the affected states. What is clear however is that these affected states have publicly vowed to maintain their territorial integrity and will not secede to the NSCN-IM's demands.

16. In recent years there have been numerous artistic based initiatives—either in music, fashion, art, drama, film, or tourist villages—which seem to focus on the hybridity of culture as a way to revitalize tradition and to promulgate a sense of national identity. For example, Adivasi Arts Trust and the Government of Nagaland have collaborated on an animation entitled *Man, Tiger, Spirit*, based on the 'tribal mythology' of Nagaland: <<http://www.talleststory.com/adivasiartstrust/mediapage.html>> (accessed 27th February 2012).

17. <www.hornbillfestival.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=27> (accessed 17 December 2008).

18. The recently concluded Indian election in 2009 in the state of Manipur is a prime example of this. The regional candidate in the Naga dominated region of Manipur, who ran under the platform of integration of Naga areas (thus

challenging the territorial integrity of Manipur), lost to the Congress candidate who vowed to maintain the territorial integrity of Manipur ("Result jolts Naga unification." 2009. *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 17 May 2009).

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